The Eucharist – Its Origins and Contexts

Sacred Meal, Communal Meal, Table Fellowship in Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity

edited by

David Hellholm and Dieter Sänger

Old Testament, Early Judaism, New Testament

Mohr Siebeck

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Eating and Drinking (with) Dionysus

Benedikt Eckhardt

Abriss

Als Gott des Weins und Patron des Symposions war Dionysos Empfänger und Begründer zahlreicher Trank- und Speiseriten bei städtischen wie privaten Anlässen. Zugleich provozierte er wie kein anderer Gott paganes Nachdenken über die Grenzen zwischen Göttern und Menschen, gerade auch mit Blick auf die Frage nach der Möglichkeit göttlicher Präsenz beim Mahl. Nach geläufiger Redewendung trank man beim Weingenuss Dionysos; eine Vorstellung, deren theophagische Implikationen von Philosophen ins Lächerliche gezogen wurden. Da zudem zahlreiche Mysterienkulte auf Vorstellungen von Dionysos als Herr über das Totenreich beruhten, ergibt sich eine Vielzahl allenfalls lose miteinander verbundener, ritueller wie rein literarischer Kontexte, in denen mit dem Dionysoskult unterschiedliche Konzeptionen kultischer Mahlzeiten verknüpft werden.

1. The manifest god

Dionysus was a god of epiphanies. While many Greek gods could be met on this or that occasion by (often inadvertent) humans, no other god had a similar reputation for responding to human invocations.[1] He could also turn up surprisingly, as in the legends surrounding his most important gift to humanity, the wine. *Nec enim praesentior illo est deus*, according to Ovid's famous words in his Metamorphoses.[2]

Given Dionysus' unusual habit of revealing himself to his worshippers, it is perhaps not surprising that studies on ancient meals have repeatedly adduced evidence for Dionysiac banquets in order to show that like Christianity, pagan antiquity knew the idea of a god being present at the meal – or even in the elements of the meal. His function as the god of wine, his role in symposiastic iconography, and some suggestive mythological traditions added to the general plausibility of the "manifest god" joining humans during their banquets. Pauline and Johannine theology of meals have therefore been connected in various ways with Dionysiac worship, as examples of the general relationship between Christianity and the so-called "mystery cults".[3]

It is the purpose of this paper to comprehensively present the evidence on meals related to the cult of Dionysus, and to re-evaluate the question whether or not the god's special "epiphanic" character entailed corresponding forms of commensality.

[1] On this notion, cf. Albert Henrichs, "Göttliche Präsenz als Differenz".

[2] Ov. *met.* 3.656–657.

[3] Cf. the contribution on "Meals in the Cults of Cybele and Attis" in this publication, 1779–1794.

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2. The wine god

Revered as the god of wine throughout the Greek world, Dionysus was honored with festivals in many cities. The most relevant one for our purposes are the Athenian Anthesteria, a major spring festival that combined the celebration of the new wine with peculiar rituals for the dead. The Anthesteria were divided into three parts.[4] On the first day, the *pithoigia* ("opening of the barrels") was celebrated with libations, wine-drinking and banquets; Plutarch mentions a prayer over the new wine, regarded as a φάρμακον that could have positive or negative effects.[5] The second day, the *choes*, saw a sacred marriage of Dionysus with the wife of the Archon Basileus, but also competitive wine-drinking in public and private contexts; the winner of the drinking contest received a wineskin.[6] On the same day, the dead souls left their habitation in the netherworld and entered the world of the living; the Athenians therefore began the day with apotropaic rites and closed the temple doors (except the temple of Dionysus).[7] The third day, the *chytroi*, was dedicated to Hermes Chthonios and the dead. Although Dionysus was not completely excluded from the ceremonies, it was apparently only Hermes who received the *panspermia*, a special vegetarian sacrifice offered in "pots" (*chytroi*) by each household and presumably consumed by humans (but not the priests).[8] On the whole, the festival offered room for quite a lot of semantically loaded consumption of liquids and solids, with a special emphasis on wine. The latter might be expected in a Dionysiac context, but is hardly attested for other occasions; judging from the fragmentary sources, not many festivals in honor of the wine god actually involved the ritual drinking of wine.[9]

This was different in the social context most clearly associated with the god of wine. Dionysus apparently became the patron god of the *symposium* in the late Archaic period.[10] The vase paintings show his importance and also associate sympotic interaction

[4] The reconstruction is based on a variety of sources, some (especially Aristoph. *Ach.*) from the Classical period, some very late. As with many other elements of Greek religion, our knowledge of the ritual procedures and the meaning of the whole festival has continually declined since the early 20th century. Contrast the optimistic treatment by Ludwig Deubner, *Attische Feste*, 93–123, who offers a full reconstruction and interpretation, with the much more skeptical one by Robert Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, 290–316.

[5] Plut. *quaest. conv.* 655E.

[6] Aristoph. *Ach.* 1000–1002.

[7] Phot. lex. s.v. μιαρὰ ἡμέρα.

[8] The main source is Theopompus FGrH 115 F 347 a and b, given in two quotations by Schol. Aristoph. *Ach.* 1076a (i); Schol. Aristoph. *ran.* 218. According to the first quotation, no-one eats from the *chytroi* containing the *panspermia*, according to the second, no-one of the priests does so (implying that other people do); the first version is followed by Deubner, *Attische Feste*, 112–113, the second by Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, 295–296 (in both cases, the alternative version is not mentioned). In both quotations, it is clear that the *panspermia* is offered to Hermes alone, but according to Didymus (in Schol. Aristoph. *Ach.* 1076a [ii]) and Suda s.v. χύτροι, it was offered to Hermes and Dionysus (although Theopompus is also paraphrased in the Suda, again mentioning only Hermes). Natale Spineto, "La *panspermia* degli Anthesteria" therefore argues that Dionysus was also involved, and that the *panspermia* signified a return to the uncivilized origins of humankind.

[9] Noted by Pauline Schmitt Pantel, "Rite cultuel et rituel social", 98–100. The fragmentary state of the evidence has to be taken into account, and there are in fact some other hints as well, e.g. the use of wine by women on the so-called Lenaea-vases (on which see Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, 306–312), and the vessel containing five elements, wine among them, that was offered to the winner of a running contest at the Oschophoria; cf. Deubner, *Attische Feste*, 144–146.

[10] Cf. Burkhard Fehr, "What Has Dionysus to Do with the Symposium?", based on the vase paintings. His explanation that *symposia* became more and more disorderly (less "civic") and were therefore put under

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with cult; thus, the *krater* could be set in parallel to an altar or to Dionysus himself.[11] That the whole event stood under the patronage of the wine god is also made explicit in philosophical literature.[12] The symposium was also framed by ritual procedures. The preceding meal ended with a sip from a cup of unmixed wine, called ἀγαθοῦ δαίμονος, "of the Good Divinity"; then the *symposium* began with three libations, often for Zeus Olympios, the Heroes and Zeus Soter, but other gods could also be included, especially Hygieia and the "Good Divinity".[13] Dionysus himself is rarely mentioned in this context, but it could be argued that he is to be identified with the Agathos Daimon. This was at least the view offered by the physician Philonides (1st century CE?), who thought that "the Greeks invoke the Good Divinity when unmixed wine is distributed at their dinner parties, as a way of honoring the deity – that is, Dionysus – who discovered it".[14] Earlier sources do not explicitly suggest this identification. Philochorus († ca. 261 BCE) argues that "after the food, we drink just enough unmixed wine to get a taste, as a demonstration of the Good Divinity's power"[15]; similarly, Theophrastus († ca. 287 BCE) notes that from the "toast in honor of the Good Dinivity, they consume only a little, as if the taste was merely a reminder to them of how strong it is and of the god's generosity".[16] It seems only logical to think that the divinity in question is the god of wine, Dionysus, but at least the earlier sources consistently use the designation "Good Divinity", which may point to pre-Dionysiac origins of the custom.[17]

The notion that drinking pure wine meant tasting the god's power leads to the old question whether or not Dionysus was identified with the wine itself. The quoted statements on the cup ἀγαθοῦ δαίμονος do not have to be interpreted in this way, because the god and its power to inflict madness on people are clearly distinguished from each other. Other references are more specific. In Euripides' *Bacchae*, Dionysus himself is poured out as a libation, and Ion of Chios (5th century BCE) claims that Dionysus participates as friendly wine in the human symposia.[18] Panyasis of Halicarnassus, yet another poet from the 5th century, argues that the first round of drinking is devoted to Dionysus, out of whom the content of the bowl is made.[19] In the dialogue between Odysseus and the

the patronage of a god who encouraged *mania* and *ekstasis* is not completely convincing, given that Dionysus gained a more prominent status in civic cult around the same time.

[11] Cf. for examples François Lissarrague, *The Aesthetics of the Greek Banquet*, 25–28; 36–37.

[12] E.g. Plut. *quaest. conv.* 612E; 615A.

[13] Cf. Karl Kircher, *Die sakrale Bedeutung des Weines im Altertum*, 14–18; Theodor Klauser, "Becher", 40–42; Robin Nadeau, *Les manières de table dans le monde gréco-romain*, 176–177. For a vase painting with the inscription [σπ]ένδω τῶι δαίμονι ἀγαθ[ῶι], see François Lissarrague, "Un rituel du vin", 128–129, who, however, notes that libations are not normally included in symposium-scenes, despite their prominence in the literary sources. On the cup ἀγαθοῦ δαίμονος, see Aristoph. *equ.* 84–86; *vesp.* 524–525; Schol. Aristoph. *equ.* 85; Pollux 6.100; Athen. 15.693B–F (several quotations of earlier authors). It is clear from these texts that the cup concluded the meal and did not begin the symposium, and that it was not as a whole poured out, but drunk.

[14] Philonides *apud* Athen. 15.675C (transl. S. D. Olson).

[15] Philochorus FGrH 328 F 5b *apud* Athen. 2.38D (cf. 15.693E) (transl. S. D. Olson).

[16] Theophrastus *frg.* 572 *apud* Athen. 15.693C–D (transl. S. D. Olson).

[17] Kircher, *Die sakrale Bedeutung des Weines im Altertum*, 24–33 argues for an original chthonic connection.

[18] Eur. *Bacch.* 284; Ion of Chios frg. 26 *apud* Athen. 10.447D (text insecure, but both οἶνος φίλος and θυρσοφόρος Διόνυσος are in the nominative and thus to be identified).

[19] Panyasis frg. 17 *apud* Athen. 2.36D.

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cyclops as staged by Euripides, the identity of wine and god is questioned and affirmed at the same time:

> Od. Hear me, Cyclops, since I am acquainted with the Bakchios
> whom I gave you to drink.
> Cycl. Who is this Bakchios. Is he worshipped as a god?
> Od. Yes, the best source of joy in life for mortals.
> Cycl. At any rate, I belch him out with pleasure.
> Od. Such is this god. No mortal will he harm.
> Cycl. But how can a god love to dwell in a wine-skin?
> Od. Wherever you put him, there he is at ease.[20]

Odysseus as a Greek is obviously a far more reliable guide to the nature of the gods than a barbaric cyclops. But the latter's skepticism is to some degree justified by the dramatic context, since – as the audience knows – the drinking of wine as well as the debate on its nature are part of Odysseus' scheme that will lead to the cyclops' blinding. Still, at least in sympotic poetry and Euripidean tragedy, the idea that Dionysus could be identified with his gift to the humans seems to be firmly established.

The concentration of the evidence in the 5th century BCE is to a significant degree the result of Athenaeus' preference for classical writers. But the claim that drinking wine meant drinking Dionysus remained a standard metaphor in later periods as well. There is no way to know how serious this identification was taken outside of literary contexts, where it served as a nice and, in the *Cyclops*, even humorous stylistic device. But the problem also comes up in a very different (but equally unrepresentative) discourse, namely philosophy. Sextus Empiricus, a physician and philosopher of the 2nd century CE, quotes a text by Prodicus of Ceos that again takes us back to the 5th century and directly addresses the problem of god-drinking:

> And Prodicus of Ceos says: "The ancients accounted as Gods the sun and moon and rivers and springs and in general all the things that are of benefit for our life, because of the benefit derived from them, even as the Egyptians deify the Nile." And he says that is was for this reason that bread was worshipped as Demeter, and wine as Dionysus, and water as Poseidon, and fire as Hephaestus, and so on with each of the things that are good for use".[21]

From this philosophical perspective, calling wine "Dionysus" is a pre-scientific and rather naive approach to a gift of nature. Two centuries before Sextus Empiricus, Lucretius had already complained about those who decide "to call the sea Neptune, and corn Ceres, and to misapply the name of Bacchus rather than to use the title that is proper to that liquor"[22]; Cicero had argued along the same lines, but in a more polemical fashion:

> When we speak of corn as Ceres and wine as Liber, we employ a familiar figure of speech, but do you suppose that anybody can be so insane as to believe that the food he eats is a god?[23]

These texts do not establish a theology of meals, but discuss the nature of the gods and the differences between a philosophical and a less educated, "primitive" understanding

[20] Eur. *Cycl.* 519–526 (transl. D. Kovacs).

[21] Sext. Emp. *adv. math.* 9.18 (transl. R. G. Bury). This passage as well as the following are listed in Manfred Wacht, "Liber (Dionysos)", 76.

[22] Lucr. 2.655–657 (transl. W. H. D. Rouse).

[23] Cic. *nat. deor.* 3.41 (transl. H. Rackham).

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of the divine. Eating and drinking – as basic human needs – were excellent examples for such a demonstration, not least because, as Cicero notes, the primitive understanding was based on a "familiar figure of speech". Taking it at face value led to a philosophically unacceptable absurdity.

This does not of course exclude the possibility that in spite of Cicero's rhetorically constructed uniformity of opinions on this matter, some people (for whose views we have no evidence at all) sincerely believed that drinking wine implied drinking Dionysus. At any rate, the rejection of this identification remained a part of philosophical reasoning until late antiquity. Sallustius, a supporter of Julian's pagan revival, in ca. 363 CE wrote a treatise "on the gods and the world" and ascribes the "primitive" views on this matter to the Egyptians:

> The worst explanation[24], the material, is that which the Egyptians because of their ignorance used most; they regarded and described material things as gods, earth as Isis, moisture as Osiris, heat as Typhon, or water as Kronos, the fruits of the soil as Adonis, wine as Dionysous. To say that these things, as also plants and stones and animals, are sacred to the gods, is the part of reasonable men, to call them gods is the part of madmen, unless by a common figure of speech, as we call the sphere of the sun and the ray coming from that sphere the sun.[25]

It is possible to see this revival of an 800-years old philosophical argument in the light of Julian's anti-Christian reforms. Perhaps the Christian claim that they were eating and drinking their god inspired Sallustius to replace Cicero's anonymous (or rather rhetorically nullified) opponents with uneducated Egyptians – not a prestigious model for Christianity. But this must remain speculative. Suffice it to note that philosophical writings from the classical period to late antiquity quote a common figure of speech that identified Dionysus with the wine, and mark it as an uneducated, stupid idea. Whether or not this reflects a wide-spread tendency to take the "figure of speech" at face value must remain an open question; it is possible that the philosophers construct a position that no-one would actually endorse, in order to make their own argument.

Several versions of the origin of wine have been preserved in ancient literature, often with a similar plot: Dionysus walks the earth in disguise, is entertained to a meal by a farmer who does not recognize him, and as a reward unveils the secret of the vine. In one of these stories, told by Achilles Tatius according to a Tyrian legend, Dionysus explains his gift to the herdsman with formulaic words: "This is harvest water, this is the blood of the grape".[26] The repeated emphasis on τοῦτ᾽ ἔστιν, unparalleled apart from the New Testament, and the comparison of wine with blood are reminiscent of the words of institution, but the parallel is not really decisive.[27] Wine could be identified with Dionysus, but not with his blood.

The character of Dionysus, both as the god of wine and as an "epiphanic" god, clearly led to the development of an unusual imagery of divine involvement into human rites of consumption, including, but not limited to, symposia and banquets. While the idea

[24] In 4.1, four types of explanation are distinguished: θεολογικοί, φυσικοί, ψυχικοί und ὑλικοί.

[25] Sallust. *de deis* 4.3 (transl. A. D. NOCK).

[26] Ach. Tat. 2.2.5 (transl. S. GASELEE, slightly adapted).

[27] Christian influence on the formulation has been posited by GLEN W. BOWERSOCK, *Fiction as History*, 125–128.

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that a god could be present during meals is hardly attested in Greek or Roman sources[28], Dionysiac themes in literature and iconography often expand the usual boundaries of religious imagination. Sympotic dialogue could play with the image of the wine god as symposiarch, his identification with the wine itself was "a common figure of speech", and Dionysiac "epiphanies" at meals could be envisaged at least in art: A series of images shows a Dionysiac artist or a poet on a *kline* and an approaching Dionysus, for whom a separate *kline* is prepared.[29] To students of religious history, one question imposes itself: Does this peculiarity in the literary and artistic representation of the god and its cult really correspond to a peculiar religious experience, or is it just one facet of the Dionysiac appreciation of the *imaginaire*? But for most purposes, this question is negligible, not least because there is no hope to ever answer it in a satisfactory manner.

3. The mystery god

Dionysus' role as the god of wine is, of course, uncontroversial. Calling Dionysus a god of mysteries, i.e. of an exclusive cult with rituals of initiation and aspirations for the afterlife, is much more problematic. The designation suggests uniformity where diversity is in fact attested; some phenomena – like the Orphic gold tablets – are restricted to specific regions. And not everything that has to do with Dionysus has to do with mysteries; the very concept of mystery gods has lost much of its plausibility in more recent research.[30] Mysteries were just one of several options for Dionysiac cult, and their form was subject to both regional and chronological variations.

But although traditional scholarly attempts to reconstruct developments of "the" Dionysiac mysteries in the Hellenistic and Roman periods[31] appear less convincing today than they did in an older framework of religious history, it would be wrong to deny the existence of any overarching commonalities in Dionysiac worship. At least in the Roman period, they can be discerned both on an organizational and a theological level. Thus, epigraphic evidence shows a significant overlap in the designations used for functionaries (perhaps comparable to the cult of Mithras), and a number of details given in inscriptions from different areas can easily be related to Dionysiac mythology, although the local forms could vary considerably.[32]

It is not always clear if "mysteries" were in fact performed in a proper sense, not least because we lack clear criteria for distinguishing "real" from pseudo-mysteries.[33] But that Dionysus was often worshipped in cults that demanded initiation seems clear. Most of the evidence for Dionysiac mysteries can be related in one way or another to "Orphic" mythology. The designation encompasses traditions and rituals surrounding the myth

[28] Cf. Paul Veyne, "Inviter les dieux"; Jörg Rüpke, "Gäste der Götter – Götter als Gäste"; Benedikt Eckhardt, "Mahl V", 1033–1038.

[29] Taken as merely imaginative by Veyne, "Inviter les dieux", 18–20. Cf. on the development of the types Carl Watzinger, "Theoxenia des Dionysos".

[30] Cf. especially Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*.

[31] Esp. Martin P. Nilsson, *The Dionysiac Mysteries*; Reinhold Merkelbach, *Die Hirten des Dionysos*.

[32] Cf. for examples Anne-Françoise Jaccottet, "Un dieu, plusieurs mystères?"; she stresses diversity, but there is some uniformity of terminology even in her evidence.

[33] The problem is discussed, but not convincingly solved by Jaccottet, "Un dieu, plusieurs mystères?", 220.

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of Dionysus Zagreus who was torn apart and eaten by the titans.[34] Orphic-Dionysiac initiates are responsible for the earliest corpus of evidence for Dionysiac mysteries: the "gold-tablets", small texts written on gold leaves and deposited in graves in order to guide the soul in the afterlife.[35]

While the tablets never directly refer to ritual activities, it is a common assumption that they do at times reflect rituals that the deceased had performed during his or her lifetime. The most interesting tablet in this regard, dated to the late fourth century BCE, was found in a woman's grave at Pelinna in Thessaly:

> Now you have died and now you have come into being, O thrice happy one, on this same day.
> Tell Persephone that the Bacchic One himself released you.
> Bull, you jumped into milk.
> Quickly, you jumped into milk.
> Ram, you fell into milk.
> You have wine as your fortunate honor.
> And below the earth are ready for you the same prizes as for the other blessed ones.[36]

The milk also figures in two tablets from Thurii, dated to the fourth century BCE. In one of them, it is stated that "you have become a god instead of a mortal. A kid you fell into milk", while in the other, the speaker himself declares: "a kid I fell into milk".[37] Much speculation about rites involving milk has been based on these texts, some of it turned obsolete by the publication of the Pelinna-tablet in 1987. No emphasis should be placed on the animal. The kid is missing from the Pelinna-tablet, instead a bull and a ram are mentioned, in a grave that contained one female body. The non-metrical character of the phrases involving milk (as opposed to the surrounding hexameters) may give some support to the view that these are ritual acclamations.[38] But in the texts, the falling/jumping into milk seems to be another expression for the process that according to the preceding lines has just been completed: "the Bacchic One released you", "you have become a god". This does not exclude rites involving milk performed during the initiate's lifetime, but it is more probable that milk is used in some metaphorical sense. The wording remains enigmatic, but does not suggest consumption.[39]

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[34] That myth (which goes on with Dionysus' rebirth from Persephone) is known in its full-fledged form only from late sources. But important elements are already attested by Philodem *piet.* N 247 III l. 1–13 (who says that "the Orphics dwell on these things intensively"), and may ultimately go back to the beginning of the Orphic "movement" in the late Archaic period. Cf. on Philodem (with text and translation) Albert Henrichs, "Dionysos Dismembered and Restored to Life"; for a hypothetical reconstruction of the origins of the myth Johnston in Fritz Graf/Sarah Iles Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife*, 66–93.

[35] Their relation to Orphism is still subject to debates; cf. the critical remarks by Albert Henrichs, "Mystika, Orphika, Dionysiaka", 94–96.

[36] Graf/Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife*, no. 26a (transl. Johnston). Cf. Alberto Bernabé/Ana Jiménez San Cristóbal, *Instructions for the Netherworld*, no. L 7a–b.

[37] Graf/Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife*, no. 3 l. 4; no. 5 l. 10 (transl. Johnston).

[38] Cf. Graf/Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife*, 138, where l. 3–5 are labeled "unmetrical" and explained as "ritual formulae that have been integrated into an earlier hexametrical text"; that the lines do have a rhythmic (if not strictly metrical) structure was noted by Christoph Riedweg, "Initiation – Death – Underworld", 229–230 (accepting the hypothesis that they refer to rituals); cf. also Bernabé/Jiménez San Cristóbal, *Instructions for the Netherworld*, 63.

[39] For the view that actual consumption of milk as a symbol of immortality is implied, see Karl Wyss, *Die Milch im Kultus der Griechen und Römer*, 53–54; for libations, see Fritz Graf, "Dionysian and Orphic

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The tablet from Pelinna is the only one to mention wine. The reference is certainly to the symposium of the dead; the deceased is imagined to be drinking wine in the netherworld.[40] It has at times been argued that the phrase rather refers to a ritual of initiation performed during the initiates' lifetime and involving wine, but the present tense – in a speech addressed to a dead person – speaks against this.[41] Among the parallels adduced for such rites in Dionysiac contexts, the only one that may carry some weight is a very fragmentary papyrus, dated to the 3rd century BCE, that could have to do with initiation into Orphism. It contains the words τελετή, σύμβολα and σύνθεμα [sic] and, in an enigmatic phrase, reports a direct speech that might be translated "as an ass I drank [---], cowherd [I became?]".[42] The style is reminiscent of both the gold tablets and the σύμβολα and συνθήματα of other cults recorded by Clement of Alexandria.[43] The cowherd is known from Dionysiac contexts, and the substance that is drunk could be reconstructed as wine.[44] If the reconstruction is accepted, this Egyptian text is the only evidence for initiation rituals involving wine – a very insecure one, not least because τελετή does not necessarily mean "initiation".[45] But this would not alter the interpretation of the tablet from Pelinna.

The Orphic tablets – designed as they are to foster individual aspirations – do not refer to organized groups, although some sort of communal experience may be assumed.[46] But from the second century BCE onwards, many associations (*thiasoi*) of Dionysiac worship-

Eschatology", 248. The phrase "I fell into milk" is regarded as a "proverb expressing happiness" by Johnston in Graf/Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife*, 129. Riedweg, "Initiation – Death – Underworld", 239 thinks of cathartic *dromena* in the context of initiation; Christopher A. Faraone, "Rushing into Milk", 314–319 argues for ritual dancing in imitation of Dionysiac epiphanies (Dionysus is at times "rushing into the fields" or the like).

[40] Cf. Graf/Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife*, 131–132. A feast in the netherworld is perhaps also to be reconstructed in a tablet from Petelia in Italy (4th century BCE; *ibid.*, no. 2 l. 11); see Radcliffe G. Edmonds III, "Festivals in the Afterlife".

[41] The initiation-theory is put forward especially by Bernabé/Jiménez San Cristóbal, *Instructions for the Netherworld*, 84–90. The supposed parallels are in part indecisive (e.g. the κρατηρισμός mentioned in Demosth. 18.259) and sometimes irrelevant; the final claim that "wine, a drink related *par excellence* to the mysteries of Dionysus, must have formed an essential part of the initiatory ceremonies that the deceased carried out during his life" (89), is revealing. Modern observers may find the use of wine in initiations logical or inescapable, but this does not mean that the Pelinna-tablet refers to such rites. Also not convincing is the idea (*ibid.*) that the present tense is used because after the death of the initiate, she receives libations of wine (again, this may be the case, but it is not the easiest explanation of the text).

[42] P. Gurôb i 3 (διὰ τὴν τελετήν); 23 (σύμβολα); 26 (σύνθεμα). The phrase supposedly involving wine is in l. 25:]ιι[.]ν ἔπιον ὄνος βουκόλος. For suggestions how ass and herdsmen are connected (a dialogue? a transformation of the speaker's identity?), see James Hordern, "Notes on the Orphic Papyrus from Gurôb", 139.

[43] See my article on "Meals in the Cults of Cybele and Attis" in this publication, 1779–1794.

[44] The reading of the remaining letters in l. 25 is difficult; cf. discussion in Hordern, "Notes on the Orphic Papyrus from Gurôb", 139, who, against earlier commentators, opts for a reading that allows for the reconstruction [o]ἶν[o]ν.

[45] Cf. for the terminological problem Ana Jiménez San Cristóbal, "¿Hubo ritos de paso cruentos en el orfismo?", 84–85, who nonetheless presupposes that the Gurôb-papyrus refers at least in part to initiation (89).

[46] An inscription from Cumae in Italy, dated to ca. 450 BCE, states that "no-one may be buried here if he is not from the βεβαχχεύμενοι" (SEG 4.92); the participle may refer to "those who have led a Bacchic life" (cf. Ana Jiménez San Cristóbal, "The Meaning of βάκχος and βακχεύειν in Orphism"), but the whole process of acquiring a burial ground speaks in favor of an organized group. Cf., also from the 5th century BCE, the Ὀρφικοί mentioned in an inscription from Olbia at the Black Sea (Laurent Dubois, *Inscriptions grecques dialectales d'Olbia du Pont* [Geneva 1996], no. 94a). On both inscriptions, see also Graf/Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife*, 158–159. 163.

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pers are attested throughout the Mediterranean world. Like all voluntary associations, they regularly held meals[47]; the details usually escape us, but the inscriptions give no reason to assume that these banquets differed significantly from those of other groups. Still, some scratches of evidence for Dionysiac group life and its meals are worth a closer look.

Dionysiac cult groups spread in the Hellenistic world without reported conflicts with authorities.[48] Their reception was very different at Rome, where they stood at the centre of a manifest political crisis. In 186 BCE, the senate reacted to the growing popularity of the Bacchic cult with harsh measures; responsible persons were arrested or executed, and future gatherings were strictly regulated.[49] In his famous report, Livy describes a crucial element in the cult's transformation that had facilitated its expansion:

> There were initiatory rites which at first were imparted to a few, then began to be generally known among men and women. To the religious element were added (*additae … religioni*) the delights of wine and meals, that the minds of a larger number might be attracted. When wine had inflamed their minds, and night and the mingling of males with females, youth with age, had destroyed every sentiment of modesty, all varieties of corruption first began to be practiced, since each one had at hand the pleasure answering to that to which his nature was more inclined.[50]

The wording is interesting, because it suggests that meals were introduced only at a later stage of the cult's development in order to attract new members; at the same time, Livy takes care to distinguish commensality from the proper *religio*. That meals were used as a "marketing strategy" is a plausible idea and has parallels in other cults; less plausible is their strict separation from *religio* – this tendency may be attributed to Livy's conservative perspective.[51]

Another passage in Livy's report has attracted some attention: The initiation of the young Publius Aebutius, Livy's entrance point into the story, includes a 10-days period of fasting; after having eaten on the 10th day, he is led to the sanctuary.[52] The eating referred to is the logical end of the required fasting. As in the case of the gold tablets, it would be a hasty inference to conclude that initiation into the Dionysiac mysteries was regularly achieved through an initiation meal. There is in fact no further evidence for such claims, apart perhaps from a Sibylline oracle from Perinthus, tentatively dated to the second century CE, that may refer to a rite of consumption – but several other options for reconstructing the text have been proposed, and the whole context is rather enigmatic.[53]

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[47] On the meals of associations, cf. Markus Öhler, "Mähler und Opferhandlungen in griechisch-römischen Vereinigungen" in this publication, 1413–1439.

[48] They could even be included in the strategies of monarchic representation; cf. Walter Burkert, "Bacchic Teletai in the Hellenistic Age", 265–268. The control exercised by Ptolemy IV over initiations into the Bacchic mysteries (P. Oxy. 2465) was not concerned with *thiasoi*, but with individual priests.

[49] Cf. John A. North, "Religious Toleration in Republican Rome"; Wilfried Nippel, "Orgien, Ritualmorde und Verschwörung?".

[50] Liv. 39.8.5–6 (transl. E. T. Sage, except for *epularum*).

[51] Cf. Benedikt Eckhardt, "Meals, Cult and Marketing".

[52] Liv. 39.9.4.

[53] The text as given by Anne-Françoise Jaccottet, *Choisir Dionysos* II, no. 36, l. 2–3: ἐπὰν δ' ὁ Βάκχος εὐάσας πλησ[θήσ]ετα[ι], [τ]ό[τ]ε αἷμα καὶ πῦρ καὶ κόνις μιγήσεται ("After the Bakchos, having cried 'Euai', has been nourished, blood, fire and ash will be mixed"). Cf. *ibid*., p. 75 for previous attempts to read the last word in l. 2 (πληγήσεται, πλανήσεται). On the lack of evidence for meals of initiation, see Benedikt Eckhardt, "Initiationsmähler". On omophagy as a possible exception, see below.

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Peculiar rules on Dionysiac eating are preserved in a metrical inscription from Smyrna, dated to the second half of the second century CE.[54] The *lex sacra*, set up by a "revealer of the god" (*theophantes*) and at least in part addressed to a group of *mystai*, contains purity rules that regulate entrance into the sanctuary of Bromius (a common epithet of Dionysus). It also prohibits certain behavior. Orphic traditions help to elucidate a number of taboos: eggs, hearts, mint and beans are to be avoided by the worshippers.[55] Less clear is the demand to abstain from "unsacrificed sacrifices".[56] In this local cult (possibly an association with defined membership), adherence to Orphic-Dionysiac traditions apparently influenced the way people ate. But the inscription only regulates the menu, leaving the details of ritual unmentioned.

This may be different in a famous Athenian inscription from the 170s CE that contains rules and regulations of the Iobakchoi, a rich Dionysiac association.[57] Besides the conventional rules on maintaining order at the monthly banquets, five roles are distributed among the worshippers: Dionysus, Palaemon, Aphrodite, Proteurythmos and Kore. During or after the banquets, the Iobakchoi must have enjoyed a performance of episodes taken from Dionysiac mythology, presumably in one of its Orphic versions, given the presence of Kore.[58] Mythological re-enactments were certainly a traditional part of sympotic entertainment – suffice it to point to the end of Xenophon's *Symposium*, where actors play the encounter of Dionysus and Ariadne.[59] But in the case of the Iobakchoi, the members of the association themselves took on the roles of the gods. This may suggest that the Iobakchoi took part in a more general trend of the imperial era to connect myth and ritual, resulting, *inter alia*, in "mimetic meals" best visible in the cults of Mithras and Christ.[60] However, the relationship of the sacred drama performed in this Bakcheion to the meals is not entirely clear.

It can be taken for granted that banquets were held in Dionysiac associations, that they could be used for attracting new members, and that in certain cases, the religious character of the group determined the shape of the meal. There is little evidence for "mystery meals" or special rites of consumption in the context of initiation. As should be expected from epigraphic evidence, the little that is to be learned about meals held in Dionysiac groups does not suggest that they had an extraordinary or even transgressive character. Neither do the literary sources. The Boukoloi who are reported to have sacrificed and eaten a Roman centurio in the course of a revolt in Lower Egypt in 172 CE carry a name used in Dionysiac associations, but have no apparent connection to the god.[61] Howev-

[54] I. Smyrna 728; LSAM 84.

[55] L. 10–14. Cf. on the inscription Nilsson, *The Dionysiac Mysteries*, 133–143; Merkelbach, *Die Hirten des Dionysos*, 29; Robert Turcan, *Liturgies de l'initiation bacchique*, 32–33.

[56] L. 11: μηθ' ἀθύτοις θυσίαις ἱερῶν ἐπὶ χῖρας ἰάλ[λειν]. Cf. Franciszek Sokołowski's comment in LSAM, p. 188: "L'expression ἄθυτοι θυσίαι signifie le sacrifice qui ne correspond pas aux exigences du rituel"; cf. also Nilsson, *The Dionysiac Mysteries*, 135–136, who remains undecided.

[57] IG II² 1368.

[58] L. 124–125. On the *dramatis personae*, see Merkelbach, *Die Hirten des Dionysos*, 26–28.

[59] Xen. *symp.* 9.2–7.

[60] Cf. for this trend Roger Beck, "Ritual, Myth, Doctrine, and Initiation", 173–175 (who calls it "sacramental mentality"); and on mimetic meals Eckhardt, "Mahl V", 1042–1043. Deubner, *Attische Feste*, 149–151 argues that the drama performed by the Iobakchoi was related to the Anthesteria.

[61] Cass. Dio 71.4; the ritual is regarded as authentic by Albert Henrichs, *Die Phoinikika des Lollianos*, 48–51; contrast Bowersock, *Fiction as History*, 51–53.

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er, to this general impression of normality and inoffensiveness, there is one important exception: The tradition that under certain circumstances, Dionysiac worship involved tearing a bull to pieces and eating the raw meat (omophagy). Since omophagy is closely connected with the scholarly concept of Dionysiac theophagy, both problems should be treated together.

4. The god tartare?

The last aspect to be discussed here is the question of theophagy ("eating the god"). It belongs to the qualification of Dionysus as a "mystery god", but deserves a brief separate treatment due to its importance as a supposed analogy to Christian practice.

The most important element of Dionysiac cult for a theophagic interpretation is a sequence of two rituals, the tearing apart of animals and the eating of raw flesh – in Plutarch's terminology, *diaspasmos* and *omophagia*.[62] According to Plutarch, they are performed for apotropaic purposes, while the much later Christian author Firmicus Maternus gives a vivid description of the Cretan practice to tear apart (and apparently eat) a bull.[63] Firmicus connects this practice with the myth of Dionysus Zagreus, who as a child was torn apart, cooked and eaten by the titans; his Cretan worshippers tear apart the bull as an annual commemoration of the titans' horrible meal. It has often been claimed that the only "logical" way to connect myth (Dionysus torn apart and consumed by the titans) and ritual (*sparagmos* and *omophagia* performed by Dionysiac worshippers) is theophagy: the worshippers engaged in a mimetic ritual that commemorated the passion of Dionysus; the animal that was torn apart and eaten raw was a symbolic representation of the god himself.[64]

This reconstruction was originally based at least in part on anthropological models[65] and is still highly valued in some corners of theological scholarship. Some elements can be supported by late Christian sources, especially the mimetic aspect: Firmicus clearly ascribes a commemorative and, implicitly, a mimetic purpose to the Cretan ritual, a scholiast to Clement of Alexandria explains the "unholy distribution of meat" as a "representation of the *sparagmos*" (i.e., of the tearing apart of young Dionysus), and Photius explains that such rituals are performed "in imitation of the passion of Dionysus".[66] Still, the theophagic interpretation has largely been abandoned in scholarship on Greek religion. Apart from its problematic history of scholarship, the interpretation raises at least two questions: Why would the worshippers take over the role of the titans, the evil-doers

[62] See below, note 83.

[63] Firm. *err. prof. rel.* 6.1–5.

[64] Cf., among others: Otto Gruppe, *Griechische Mythologie und Religionsgeschichte*, 731–735; Albrecht Dieterich, *Eine Mithrasliturgie*, 105; Alfred Loisy, *Les mystères païens et le mystère chrétien*, 32–25; Adolf Lumpe, "Essen", 620; Hans-Josef Klauck, *Herrenmahl und hellenistischer Kult*, 109–111; Wacht, "Liber (Dionysos)", 72; cf. also the recent derivative treatments by Silke Petersen, "Jesus zum ‚Kauen'", 124–125, and Esther Kobel, *Dining with John*, 231–237. More cautious interpretations were offered early on: Edgar Reuterskiöld, *Die Entstehung der Speisesakramente*, 126–133; Ludwig Ziehen, "Opfer", 523–524.

[65] Cf. for totemism and tribal *rites de passage* Jane Ellen Harrison, *Themis*, 118–157; for the consumption of vital (and divine) energy (*orenda*) as incorporation, see Friedrich Pfister, "Kultus", 2181–2184.

[66] Schol. Clem. Alex. *protr.* 119.1 on δύσαγνον κρεανομίαν (a δεῖγμα of the σπαραγμός); Photius lex. s. v. νεβρίζειν (κατὰ μίμησιν τοῦ περὶ τὸν Διόνυσον πάθους); cf. Miguel Herrero de Jáuregui, "Dionysos micuit", 409–412; Wacht, "Liber (Dionysos)", 87–88.

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of this story? And is it legitimate to explain pagan myth and ritual according to a "logic" taken from Christianity?

Starting with the second question, it is worth asking if theophagy is actually attested as an idea in any pagan source. As could already be seen above in the discussion of wine, Cicero found the idea that a god was actually eaten absurd, although he knew the common figure of speech that called the grain Ceres/Demeter. This lack of a concept of theophagy can be observed in the reception history of the Eucharist as well. When the nameless Greek (Porphyry?) in Macarius Magnes' *Apocriticus* is confronted with the "theophagic" command to eat and drink the flesh and blood of Jesus, he can only think of cannibalism – not because he believes the polemical accusations that were current in the 2nd and earlier 3rd century CE, but because the thought of eating a god was an unfamiliar one.[67] There is reason to believe that this reflects not only an elite view on pagan theology, but common religious experience.[68] With regard to omophagy, it has justly been noted that no pagan text supports its interpretation as theophagy[69], and one might add that even the Christian authors do not explicitly make this claim. Still, exceptions from the general rule may be postulated at least for magical rites, where theophagic formulae concerning Osiris are used[70], so the claim that Dionysus was eaten by at least some of his worshippers should not be rejected without a look at the evidence.

The first question is perhaps less problematic. There are indications that initiates smeared their faces with chalk or clay on certain occasions, in imitation of the titans who, according to one version of the myth, deceived the young Dionysus in this way.[71] In a "Mysterienspiel", one could easily imagine worshippers playing the roles of the evil-doers. But Christian commentators might still have been misinformed about the way ritual mimesis worked in Dionysiac-Orphic contexts. After all, in the *Bacchae*, it is Dionysus himself who eats raw flesh[72], and in a Milesian inscription dated to 276/5 BCE, the deposition of an ὠμοφάγιον is mentioned as one of the rituals to be performed by the priestess of Dionysus – presumably a special sacrifice to the god.[73] One of the cult-names of Dionysus, though rarely attested, was Omestes or Omadios, "raw-eater".[74] So did the initiates imitate Dionysus instead of eating him?

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[67] Mac. Magn. *apocr.* 3.15 (= Porphyry, Contra Christianos frg. 69 Harnack). Cf. on the passage John G. Cook, "Reactions to the Eucharist in Paganism" in this publication, 1685–1714.

[68] Cf. Eckhardt, "Mahl V", 1038–1042.

[69] Herrero de Jáuregui, "Dionysos mi-cuit", 407–412.

[70] PGM 7.644–646; 14.442; cf. 1.20–21; on these texts, see Klauck, *Herrenmahl und hellenistischer Kult*, 156–158.

[71] Nonn. *Dionys.* 6.169–173; cf. Henrichs, *Die Phoinikika des Lollianos*, 66; Rosa García-Gasco Villarubia, "Titans in Disguise".

[72] Eur. *Bacch.* 135–142: Welcome is the god when on the mountains / he leaves the coursing covens / and falls to the ground, his holy / garment of fawnskin about him, in pursuit / of the shed blood of the slain goat, the glad meal of raw flesh, / rushing to the mountains / of Lydia, this leader of ours, Bromios: / Euhoi! (transl. D. Kovacs).

[73] Milet VI 3 1222; LSAM 48, 2–3: μὴ ἐξεῖναι ὠμοφάγιον ἐμβαλεῖν μηθενὶ πρότερον [ἢ ἡ ἱέ]ρεια ὑπὲρ τῆς πόλεως ἐμβάλῃ ("it is not permitted to anyone to throw/deposit the *omophagion* before the priestess has thrown/deposited it on behalf of the city"). Many different explanations have been put forward; cf. for discussion Albert Henrichs, "Die Maenaden von Milet", 235–236; and id., "Greek Maenadism from Olympias to Messalina", 151 for the plausible view that this is "nothing but a peculiar type of Dionysiac sacrifice".

[74] On the rare attestations, usually in connection with human sacrifice (esp. Plut. *Them.* 13.2–5 = Phainias *frg.* 25), see Albert Henrichs, "Human Sacrifice in Greek Religion", 218–223.

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Not all raw-eating mentioned in the sources was performed by the god. The most important piece of evidence is a fragment of the *Cretans*, an earlier play by Euripides:

> Pure is the life I have led since I became an initiate of Idaean Zeus and a servitor of night-ranging Zagreus, performing his feasts of raw flesh; and raising torches high to the mountain Mother among the Curetes, I was consecrated and named a celebrant. In clothing all of white I shun the birthing of men, and the places of their dead I do not go near; against the eating of animal foods I have guarded myself.[75]

That the god mentioned here is Zeus Zagreus may be explained as a Cretan local color; the Dionysiac and, more specifically, Orphic overtones are clear enough.[76] This first attestation of omophagy in Greek literature takes us back to initiation. A traditional theory that has recently been revived takes the passage as evidence for a *rite de passage*: in order to be fully integrated into the Orphic community (that is, in order to become a *mystes*), candidates had to separate themselves from it by committing an atrocious, bloody sacrifice that was, in addition, related to the founding myth of Orphism; after their purification and re-integration, they lived the "Orphic life" described by Plato and others and abstained from animal food.[77] It cannot be denied that this is quite frankly what the fragment says, at least regarding the temporal sequence of events. But theophagic connotations are absent[78], and much skepticism is appropriate when a literary text is read as a handbook for ritual.[79]

Cultic omophagy is hardly ever attested. The papyrus from Gurob mentions raw meat, but is too fragmentary to draw conclusions.[80] It is common to argue that the omophagic ritual of Dionysiac cult has been "tamed" and reduced to symbolic actions in the Hellenistic period.[81] This view, partly based on a different interpretation of the inscription from Miletus discussed above, relies on the questionable assumption that omophagy was once actually practiced (the only evidence being the fragment from the *Cretans*); it also fails to account for the lack of evidence even for these symbolic substitutes. Diodorus does note that women in Greek cities imitate the original maenads, but only by sacrificing to Dionysus and celebrating his mysteries – raw-eating, be it symbolical or real, does not figure in this account.[82] Plutarch refers in a general remark to "festivals and sacrifices, which may be compared with ill-omened and gloomy days, in which occur the eating of raw flesh (ὠμοφαγίαι), rending of victims (διασπασμοί), fasting, and beating of breasts", and claims that "these acts are not performed for any god, but are soothing and appeasing rites for the averting of evil spirits".[83] This is the first attestation of the noun ὠμοφαγία, and the reference may well be to Dionysiac rites, but the passage is a doubtful proof for ac-

[75] Eur. *frg.* 472, l. 9–20 (transl. J. Henderson).

[76] Cf. Adele-Teresa Cozzoli, *Euripide. Cretesi*, 83–85.

[77] Jiménez San Cristóbal, "¿Hubo ritos de paso cruentos en el orfismo?". Cf. also, among others, Marcel Detienne, "Pratiques culinaires et esprit de sacrifice", 16–20, who notes the subversive character of a sacrifice eaten raw (in a world where the distribution of cooked sacrificial meat had an important function for establishing social order) and its role in forming group identity.

[78] Contrast, e.g., Cozzoli, *Euripide. Cretesi*, 92, who takes the passage as describing a ritual "con cui ci si assimila al dio tramite l'ingestione delle carni crude di animali che ne rappresentano l'incarnazione".

[79] Cf. the criticism by Dirk Obbink, "Dionysus Poured Out", 68–72.

[80] P. Gurôb i 14.

[81] Nilsson, *The Dionysiac Mysteries*, 7; Turcan, *Liturgies de l'initiation bacchique*, 41.

[82] Diod. 4.3.3.

[83] Plut. *de def. orac.* 14 (417 C), transl. F. C. Babbitt.

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tual omophagic practice around 100 CE. Omophagy is more prominent in later Christian sources. This leads us back to Firmicus Maternus and his description of Cretan cult – and to the possibility that the connection between myth and ritual established in this report is actually a construct based on the *Cretans* and other literary sources, designed to show the horrors of paganism.

It should be remembered that even if omophagy was actually practiced on a broader basis than is suggested by the sources, no text – pagan or Christian – ever claims that the god was identified with the animal. Furthermore, the only sources to connect the myth of Dionysus Zagreus with omophagic ritual are late antique Christian polemics. What may appear "logical" to ancient – and modern – Christian observers was not necessarily evident for Dionysiac worshippers. The claim that Dionysus was eaten by his worshippers should therefore be abandoned.[84]

5. Conclusion

Looking for meals in the cult of the wine god, one would expect to find rites of consumption involving wine as well as banquets involving drunkenness. Evidence for both has been adduced here, but much of it is not peculiar to this cult. Conversely, some of those elements that have often been argued to be specifically Dionysiac are not well – or not at all – attested. Still, the rich world of Dionysiac imagery and mythology is worth mining for evidence on meals, and has important insights to offer to those who study the origin and contexts of the Eucharist. Dionysus was the god of the symposium, an almost canonical context of commensality in the Graeco-Roman world that influenced early Christian traditions in various ways.[85] It is natural to assume that the literary and iconographic traditions about Dionysus, including his presence at meals, influenced Christian authors more than many other aspects of "pagan theology". And it cannot be excluded that the "common figure of speech" which identified god and wine, ridiculed by the philosophers, had some impact on Christian thought as well. While it is impossible to deduce the Eucharist and its development from a Dionysiac blueprint, the argument for a more indirect form of pagan influence on Christian meal traditions is more plausible in this case than in many others.

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[84] The only other element of Dionysiac cult that could possibly be interpreted as theophagic is the sacrifice for Dionysus Anthroporrhaistes on Tenos, described by Aelian *nat. animal.* 12.34. A pregnant cow is treated like a woman until it gives birth; when the "child" is born, buskins are bound to its feet and it is sacrificed. Buskins (κόθορνοι) are a Dionysiac symbol due to their role in the theatre. While this procedure has been traditionally interpreted as a substitute for human sacrifice, one could also argue that the calf represents Dionysus himself, who is sacrificed – and then eaten – by the worshippers. But it is more plausible to see the outfit of the calf as a sign that marks it as the victim par excellence for Dionysus; cf. Stella Georgoudi, "Sacrificing to Dionysos", 49–54.

[85] Cf. Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist;* Jason König, *Saints and Symposiasts.*

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